

Poet and climber, Lee Harwood is a pivotal figure in what's still termed the British Poetry Revival. He published widely since 1963, gaining awards and readers here and in America. His name evokes pioneering publishers of the last half-century. His translations of poet Tristan Tzara were published in diverse editions. Harwood enjoyed a wide acquaintance among the poets of California, New York and England. His poetry was hailed by writers as diverse as Peter Ackroyd, Anne Stevenson, Edward Dorn and Paul Auster .

Lee Harwood was born months before World War II in Leicester. An only child to parents Wilfred and Grace, he lived in Chertsey. He survived a German air raid, his bedroom window blown in across his bed one night as he slept. His grandmother Pansy helped raise him from the next street while his young maths teacher father served in the war and on to 1947 in Africa. She and Grace's father inspired in Lee a passion for stories.

Delicate, gentle, candid and attentive - Lee called his poetry stories. Iain Sinclair described him as 'full-lipped, fine-featured : clear (blue) eyes set on a horizon we can't bring into focus. Harwood's work, from whatever era, is youthful and optimistic: open.'

Lee met Jenny Goodgame, in the English class above him at Queen Mary College, London in 1958. They married in 1961. They published single issues of *Night Scene*, *Night Train*, *Soho* and *Horde*. Lee's first home was Brick Lane in Aldgate East, then Stepney where their son Blake was born. He wrote 'Cable Street', a prose collage of location and anti fascist testimonial.

His eye for Surrealism led him, aged 24, to seek the Dada poet Tristan Tzara in Paris in 1963. He gained Tzara's blessing for his translations. The American poet John Ashbery had already enjoyed ten years in Paris before he met Harwood in 1965. Their relationship triggered a lifelong bond. Elements of a very changed life, of European and American friendships flowered in *The Man With The Blue Eyes*.

Lee Harwood's *title illegible* was published in London by sound poet Bob Cobbing's Writers Forum in 1965. Then New York poets Lewis Warsh and Anne Waldman at Angel Hair issued *The Man With The Blue Eyes*. This carried a preface by John Ashbery:

*'Lee Harwood's poetry lies open to the reader, like a meadow. It moves slowly toward an unknown goal, like a river. It is carelessly wise, that is, wise without knowing or caring what wisdom is.'*

It won the 1966 Frank O'Hara Prize.

Carlyle Reedy, his peer and friend writes : 'he so much infused reality with tenderness, that he transformed ordinary life and lifted it up, in the same way that nature surprises you with its beauty. A constant craftsman. A continual observer'.

Lee's marriage ended in 1967. Apart from semesters teaching in America and Greece in 1971, 1973 and 1983 Brighton became home. The poet Stuart Montgomery at Fulcrum published three consecutive books as the 1960s closed, including *The White Room*. Reading 'As your eyes are blue' 30 years later, Harwood declared, 'who *was* that masked man?

His poetry had attained stillness, evoking another world – Snowdonian treks, Sussex coast's pearl-shell hue. Poetry was, he said 'a form of collage that tries to present and create a four dimensional world, a sense of “things” in perspective'. Equal care informed his poetry readings, hand guiding their tempo, those pauses, unfinished distances and sentences. 'This world, this fiction, was not static'.

And below around us – the flint customs house at Shoreham,  
the call of a cuckoo as we climb up-hill to the Stalldown stone row,  
the wild moor about, and from its edges  
the churches, cathedrals, ancient and beautiful things.

Talking to myself

The sweet qualities of our dreams without which ...

How the wind blows and our hearts ache to follow  
the hazardous route the winds follow

6 million Russians  
6 million Jews  
2 million Poles  
1 million Serb  
Gypsies and others

A reader hearing of fictional quotations and incomplete speech in Harwood's poetry might expect frenzy. The overheard. The din. ('The sun behind them / and bombs falling all around / 'Jah Jah / CLICK CLICK / Jah Jah'). Quite the opposite. He trained his eye on the everyday; the commonplace, a loaded word for a writer as careful as Harwood. Savouring egg 'n'chips in a cafe in the prose poem *Dream Quilt*, or mocking himself in 'Gorgeous – yet another Brighton poem' his poetics were also hedonistic.

In 1971 Harwood met Judith Walker, from Massachusetts, where he taught at the Aegean School of Fine Arts at Paros, Greece. They had two children Rafe and Rowan. Close family ties and to places he climbed walked and swam in were what kept him in work that must at times been badly paid or mundane instead of teaching creative writing in America.

Harwood's choice of jobs entailed craft and motion, and a circular rhythm which matched his way of walking in the world with tenderness, or locally on the South Downs to find rare orchids. He worked as a *British Rail* guard, manager at *Better Books*, as forester, museum attendant, monumental stone mason, theatre dresser, bus conductor and a postal clerk (a framed GPO letter in his bathroom commends Harwood's courage defusing an armed raid at Western Road Post Office, Hove).

The tale of mountaineer Harwood waist deep in snow descending Snowdonia, ten minutes to spare to reach a reading is true. But Crib y Ddysgl was also where he saw his poet and climber friend Paul Evans fall to his death in 1991.

*Penguin Modern Poets 19* carried Harwood's poems alongside Tom Raworth and John Ashbery, (1971). In 1988 Harwood's Selected Poems *Crossing the Frozen River* were published by Paladin. In 2004 Shearsman collected Harwood's poems. In 2013 Harwood received The Cholmondeley Award. Last year Enitharmon crossed a certain bridge in publishing a suite of valedictory poems, *The Orchid Boat*.

Reading in Brighton, in 2011, Harwood's care for his poems and audience was evident as he spoke with affection for local creations like Booth's museum. His presence that made you listen intently, emanated from a still centre. August Kleinzahler considered Harwood's poems to 'have been carried across many horizons by his lightness of touch: like the lightness of the hollow bones in a bird's skeleton, substantial enough to carry it long distances'.

His poetry is enhanced by their original chapbooks and pamphlets : *Old Bosham Bird Watch*, *Evening Star*, *Monster Masks*, *The Song of Those Who Are On The Sea of Glass*. He collaborated on *Boston- Brighton* with Judith Walker, then a photographer. He had a son Jake with Marian O'Dwyer, dedicatee of *Crossing the Frozen River*. His grandmother's nurture guided the poem 'African Violets', he offered his elder daughter a spell in 'The Rowan Tree'. 'Salt Water' celebrated a younger daughter Joey. Lee Harwood's poetry is unique for expressing openness to love and company, and practical empathy for the stranger :

on the late night train home

“kind gentle creature he was, died quite young”  
heard from the next seat down  
“quite diffident, and nervous”

“I shall have to answer at the Pearly Gates.  
He declared a passionate love to me,  
and I... “ (the rest unheard – train noise)

Travers Rafe Lee Harwood

6 June, 1939, Leicester  
26 July, 2015 Hove

married Jenny Goodgame, 1961, Judith Walker, 1974  
3 sons, 2 daughters (one deceased)